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Trump Calls Some Unauthorized Immigrants ‘Animals’ in Rant

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President Trump at the California Sanctuary State Roundtable in the Cabinet Room on Wednesday. Doug Mills/The New York Times

By Julie Hirschfeld Davis

May 16, 2018

WASHINGTON — President Trump lashed out at undocumented immigrants during a White House meeting on Wednesday, warning in front of news cameras that dangerous people were clamoring to breach the country’s borders and branding such people “animals.”

Mr. Trump’s comments came during a round-table discussion with state and local leaders on California’s so-called sanctuary laws, which strictly limit communication between local law enforcement and federal immigration officers, and which the Trump administration is [suing](#) to invalidate. It was hardly the first time

state and local leaders on California’s so-called sanctuary laws, which strictly limit communication between local law enforcement and federal immigration officers, and which the Trump administration is [suing](#) to invalidate. It was hardly the first time the president has spoken in racially fraught terms about immigrants, but it underscored his anger about unchecked immigration — the animating issue of his campaign and his tenure so far — and his frustration that he has not been able to do more to seal the nation’s borders.

As he has in numerous private meetings with his advisers at the White House, Mr. Trump used the session to vent about the nation’s immigration laws, calling them “the dumbest laws on immigration in the world.” He exhorted his administration to “do much better” in keeping out undesirable people, including members of transnational gangs like MS-13.

“We have people coming into the country, or trying to come in — we’re stopping a lot of them,” Mr. Trump said in the Cabinet Room during an hourlong meeting that reporters were allowed to document. “You wouldn’t believe how bad these people are. These aren’t people, these are animals, and we’re taking them out of the country at a level and at a rate that’s never happened before.”

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Mr. Trump’s remarks came as the local officials invited for the event took turns praising his immigration policies and lamenting California’s law, arguing that it was making it more difficult for their communities to find and deport criminals.

Sheriff Margaret Mims of Fresno County said the statute barred Immigration and Customs Enforcement authorities from using her databases “to find the bad guys,” or from entering prisons to locate people who might be in the country illegally.

“It’s really put us in a very bad position,” Sheriff Mims said.

“It’s a disgrace,” Mr. Trump answered, “and we’re suing on that.”

The president’s language and his focus on California drew a sharp rebuke from Jerry Brown, the state’s Democratic governor.

“Trump is lying on immigration, lying about crime and lying about the laws of California,” Mr. Brown said in a statement. “Flying in a dozen Republican politicians to flatter him and praise his reckless policies changes nothing. We, the citizens of the fifth-largest economy in the world, are not impressed.”

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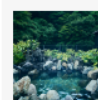
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During the session, Mr. Trump suggested that the mayor of Oakland, Calif., should be charged with obstruction of justice for [warning her constituents](#) in February of an impending large-scale immigration raid and arrests.

“You talk about obstruction of justice,” said the president, who is himself the subject of a special counsel’s investigation into whether he sought to thwart a federal examination of Russia’s meddling in the 2016 elections. “I would recommend that you look into obstruction of justice for the mayor of Oakland.”

Turning to Jeff Sessions, his attorney general, who sat at the other end of the large wooden conference table, Mr. Trump said: “Perhaps the Department of Justice can look into that.”



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The round table took place exactly one week after Mr. Trump used a closed-door cabinet meeting to [castigate Kirstjen Nielsen](#), the secretary of homeland security, for failing to do enough to crack down at the border. On Wednesday, Ms. Nielsen said little when called upon to speak, other than to thank Mr. Trump for his leadership on the issue.

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“You’re doing a good job, and it’s not an easy job,” Mr. Trump told Ms. Nielsen.

He alluded to a recent push by his administration that [parents be separated from their children](#) when families cross illegally into the United States, but blamed Democrats — many of whom have vehemently opposed the practice — for the new policy.

“I know what you’re going through right now with families is very tough, but those are the bad laws that the Democrats gave us,” Mr. Trump said. “We have to break up families. The Democrats gave us that law.”

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“Mexico does nothing for us,” Mr. Trump said. “Mexico talks, but they do nothing for us, especially at the border. Certainly don’t help us much on trade, but especially at the border, they do nothing for us.”

His harsh criticism came as American and Mexican officials were at a critical stage in their efforts to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Mr. Trump’s heated remarks on immigration, both private and public, appear to have resonated with his advisers, who have been moving to put in place ever-stricter policies in line with the president’s vision. Mr. Sessions said the Department of Justice would be adding immigration judges and prosecuting twice as many immigration cases this year.

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“The president has made clear to all of us that we have to do better,” he said. “We are going to do better.”

The attorney general, a former senator who helped to derail previous attempts at revamping immigration laws, also expressed hope that a legislative overhaul could be enacted this year, although Republicans on Capitol Hill have shown little appetite for undertaking one.

“This is the year that we have to move Congress,” Mr. Sessions said.

A version of this article appears in print on May 17, 2018, Section A, Page 13 of the New York edition with the headline: Trump Rants on Unauthorized Migrants: ‘These Aren’t People, These Are Animals’. [Order Reprints](#) | [Today’s Paper](#) | [Subscribe](#)

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